

Carolina, and Georgia for the comments they have made. I already addressed the issue of the speech. I agree with the comments made by my colleagues here.

I want to address the substance of this. We get caught up in terminology around here and sometimes talk beyond each other. I don't know what most people are doing today, but the country almost came to a halt in August of 2011 as we negotiated some reductions in spending—\$2.1 trillion worth. Most people believed that was not enough. I know everybody in this body has been contacted by the Fix the Deck folks and others who think we need to have a \$4.5 trillion to \$5 trillion deal, and I agree with that 100 percent. I thought that was what we were going to be doing.

As the Senator from South Carolina said, had we done that, we could focus on the tremendous potential this country has. We are not going to do that.

Let me go back to August 2011 when we agreed to reduce spending by \$2.1 trillion. We implemented some things and we put some things off to what we call the sequester, which is what I am talking about now. The sequester was supposed to kick in on January 1 if we didn't reach an agreement on other spending reductions. I had hoped we would come up with other spending reductions. I know my friend, the Presiding Officer, felt the same way. But we have not done that.

Here is the substance of what the President just said in his speech; that is, since we did not come up with an agreement on spending reductions, we are going to deal with the sequester that kicks in tomorrow—the \$1.2 trillion.

EXTENSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. BENNET. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the period for morning business for debate be extended until 5 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection? Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. BENNET. I thank the Senator.

Mr. CORKER. Mr. President, I see the Senator from Kentucky. I think most people would rather listen to him than to me.

I yield the floor for the moment as he makes his comments.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, are we in a quorum call?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate is not in a quorum call. The Senator from Tennessee has yielded the floor.

THE FISCAL CLIFF

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, yesterday—after days of inaction—I came to the floor and noted the obvious: we need to act but I need a dance partner. So I reached out to the Vice President

in an effort to get things done. I am happy to report that the effort has been a successful one, and as the President just said in his television appearance, we are very close to an agreement.

We need to protect American families and job creators from this looming tax hike. Everyone agrees that action is necessary, and I can report that we have reached an agreement on all of the tax issues. We are very close.

As the President just said, the most important piece—the piece that has to be done now—is preventing the tax hikes. The President said, “For now our most immediate priority is to stop taxes going up for middle-class families starting tomorrow.” I agree. He suggested that action on the sequester is something we can continue to work on in the coming months.

So I agree, let's pass the tax relief portion now. Let's take what has been agreed to and get moving. This was not easy to get to. The Vice President and I spoke at 12:45 this morning, 6:30 this morning, and multiple times again during this morning. This has clearly been a good-faith negotiation. We all want to protect taxpayers, and we could get it done right now.

So let me be clear: We will continue to work on finding smarter ways to cut spending, but let's not let that hold up protecting Americans from the tax hike that will take place in about 10 hours from now. We can do this; we must do this.

I want my colleagues to know that we will keep everybody updated as we continue to try to wrap this up.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

Mr. CORKER. Mr. President, it is appropriate that the Senator just said what I have said, and I thank him for his comments. This, again, leads me to what I see is the rub. In his comments a minute ago, the President alluded that the tax arrangements have all been agreed to and the things Americans most care about have been agreed to.

In a late request this morning, the President wanted to do away with the sequester—the \$1.2 trillion in cuts—by paying for them with revenues instead of trading out other cuts, which is unbelievable to me with the amount of debt we have in this Nation. The fact is we have agreed to additional revenue. Now, at the last minute, what has happened is the sequester is getting ready to kick in because we could not agree to other revenue cuts. By the way, it was not part of this deal but to supplant what we did back in August 2011.

We all know the sequester is going to kick in. For some reason people think it is being done the wrong way and should be done in a different way, which I actually agree and hope we will do. Instead of reducing that spending, the President wants to add revenues to that to keep that from happening.

Now, let me explain what that means. We have this tax increase that

is getting ready to happen—by the way, I would support that—and instead of reducing the deficit like the President campaigned on, what he wants to do is use those revenues to supplant spending reductions we have already agreed to, so we are not reducing the deficit. We are using this revenue, which has been campaigned on for a year, not to reduce deficits but to keep spending cuts that have already been agreed to from happening. I don't think there are many people on either side of the aisle who would think that is a very good idea.

Now, what the President is doing is holding this agreement on taxes for all Americans hostage to keep from doing the spending reductions we have already agreed to. I don't know if most Americans who listen to us quite understand what is happening.

I listened to the President yesterday speaking with David Gregory, “Meet the Press,” and I know he talked about the \$1 trillion in spending reductions he has offered up, which by the way I applaud. The problem is I have never seen them. I don't think the Presiding Officer has ever seen them. As a matter of fact, there is not a soul in this body who has ever seen the spending reductions that the President has offered up because they don't exist.

I know there were broad contours that were talked about; I know that. The people in this body know that last week LAMAR ALEXANDER and I offered a bill on the floor to raise the debt ceiling by having \$1 trillion in entitlement reforms so we don't end up in a situation where the credit of our country is in jeopardy. Today people are paying one-third of the cost of Medicare. There will be 20 million more Americans on Medicare over the next 10 years, and we are paying for one-third of that. It is a time bomb.

We have offered reforms to cause Medicare to be here for future generations. We have done that in advance so the debt ceiling is raised in a way that does not jeopardize the country's credit. At the same time, we reformed these programs so they will be here for the future.

Yesterday the President said on television that he has offered \$1 trillion in cuts. I have never seen them. What I would say to the Presiding Officer is, if they exist it would be helpful if we could see those because that would help us with this debt ceiling debate. It may be that some of those are similar to the reforms and reductions that Senator ALEXANDER from Tennessee offered with me. That would be highly helpful. Once the pep rallies are over maybe the President could send a list of those reductions and reforms that he says he has offered that no one I know of has ever seen. I think it would be helpful to us in the debt ceiling debate.

As a matter of fact, my guess is we might agree with a lot of those. What we could do is maybe take the President's reductions that he says he has offered, which he has never offered, and